

IV. Interpretive Guidelines

"Interpretation is an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate the factual information."
Freeman Tilden, Interpretive Author

Interpretation will be the link between visitors and the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the State of Washington. As such, it is important to strive to achieve the highest quality. To do this, you will need to go beyond these guidelines to add the human element and to creatively rebuild a moment in time. The interpretation will need a focused theme that is emotional and personal to the visitor. The interpretive text and graphics outlined here will help you and your interpretive designer support and enhance this theme.



*William Clark's Elkskin-Bound Journal,
recordings of October 26, 1805*

Interpretive Considerations

There are several considerations that should guide your thinking about interpretation at your site.

- Explore a theme from the Lewis and Clark Expedition story that is uniquely tied to your particular site.
- Integrate interpretive themes throughout all interpretation.
- Interpret by showing rather than telling; interpretation is a provocative visual art that is revelation, not just information.
- Make interpretation interesting, enjoyable, memorable, personal, dynamic, challenging, and historically accurate.
- Strive to leave an imprint of emotional inspiration that relates directly with the personality or experience of the visitor.
- Create continuity between interpretive elements, sites, and the story, while also enhancing the uniqueness of each.
- Consider seasonal change and changing weather conditions.
- Consider other points of view for each facet of the story.
- Use journal quotes from the members of the Corps of Discovery and graphics from the journals; they are the link between the past and present. Use the exact words and images from the journals to make certain the story is accurately told.
- Encourage connections to other sites.
- For foreign visitors, consider conveying information graphically or using other languages, if appropriate, and for clarity to all visitors, use international symbols.
- Mapping—the purpose of the map should define the way it is designed. For orientation maps, strive for clarity, orient to the land and setting (not necessarily with north up), and tie to the physical surroundings.
- Integrate with existing signage and other interpretation where appropriate.
- Consider persons of all abilities and ages; children need more sensory-oriented and interactive exhibits, while older adults may need exhibits that are easy to access and easy to read.

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- All interpretive displays must be designed and constructed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Interpretive Themes

The interpretive theme is the central message or impression that visitors receive. It engages visitors and is the focus of an interpretive panel. A theme is a sentence that communicates a provable point about a topic. Interpretation uses facts and information to relay the thematic message. Composed through a panel's graphics and text, visitors remember interpretation based on a theme more than facts and information. It is much more interesting and understandable.

To focus the interpretive theme, consider the following:

- What are you trying to tell your visitors and what is the impression you want to make?
- Select information that directly supports the theme. A lot of information may seem important, but focus on the information and stories that reinforce the theme—all others should be eliminated. Every bit of information should be part of the theme.
- People learn best through sensory experience, so place more of an emphasis on the use of graphics, rather than text on panels. Also, relate the panel to the site to enhance the interpretive experience.



Eulachon or Candlefish from Journal

- The theme will connect visitors to their legacy of cultural and natural heritage and give meaning to the experience of the moment.
- Strengthen thematic unity by linking the place to the story.

To enhance the theme, remember that visitors will discover the most through an experience. The intellectual and emotional experience derives first from the visual, then from the other senses. Drama and authenticity should be exposed through journal quotes and graphics. Consider these guidelines:

- People remember ten percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they read, 50 percent of what they see, and 90 percent of what they do.
- The 3-30-3 rule relays the concept that most visitors will receive the interpretive message in three seconds, some will take thirty seconds, and a few will spend up to three minutes. The interpretation should be developed to be understood for all types of visitors, and be evocative enough to hold visitors through each of these levels of interest.
- Less than 1 percent of visitors will read the entire text on a panel. The longer and more complex the text is, the less time visitors will spend reading it. About 40 percent of visitors will view graphic art, and photos. About 60 percent of visitors will enter kiosk type structures. Touchable interpretive items will attract about 90% of visitors.

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Interpretive Graphics and Text

Layout

Interpretive panels are static objects that attract attention in a dynamic environment. Panels need to communicate quickly and dramatically, be important to the visitor, and relate to what the visitor sees and experiences. The layout of the panels should utilize an underlying layout grid. (See Panel Layout Grids in Appendices.) The grid is based on the National Park Service's standard layout for National Historic Trail exhibits providing a consistency for all interpretive work along the Lewis and Clark Trail. With consistent elements like title zone, outside dimensions, columns, and margins, the designer can be flexible and creative with the layout of graphics and text, and still keep the visual connection with all other Lewis and Clark Trail exhibits.

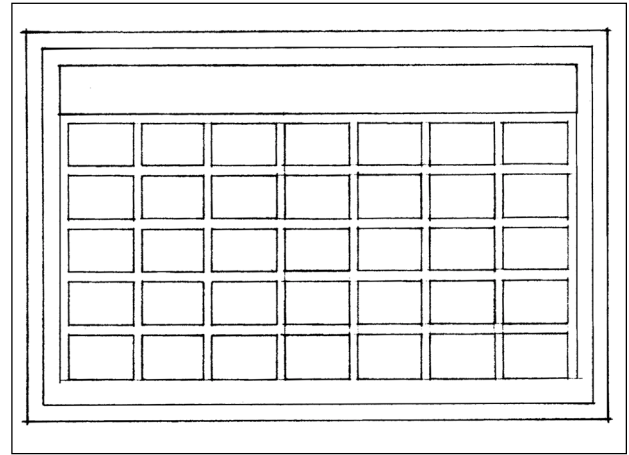
Graphics

Graphics give you the ability and power to convey the message visually. A single graphic image can replace many words, focus attention, and lead the eye through a message sequence. A strong image will catch the visitor's attention more than any other element.

Graphics should reveal hidden meanings and ideas, instead of duplicating what is seen at the site. Reward is high and effort minimal for interpretive graphics that convey detailed stories and ideas in concise and dramatic ways. They add beauty, interest, and can give an interpretive panel unity and personality.

As the design of the panels moves from concept to visual design, and then to final art, consider some graphic design and widely accepted rules of thumb often used by interpretive designers. These include:

- Keep the sign layout simple and uncluttered with enough open, unused



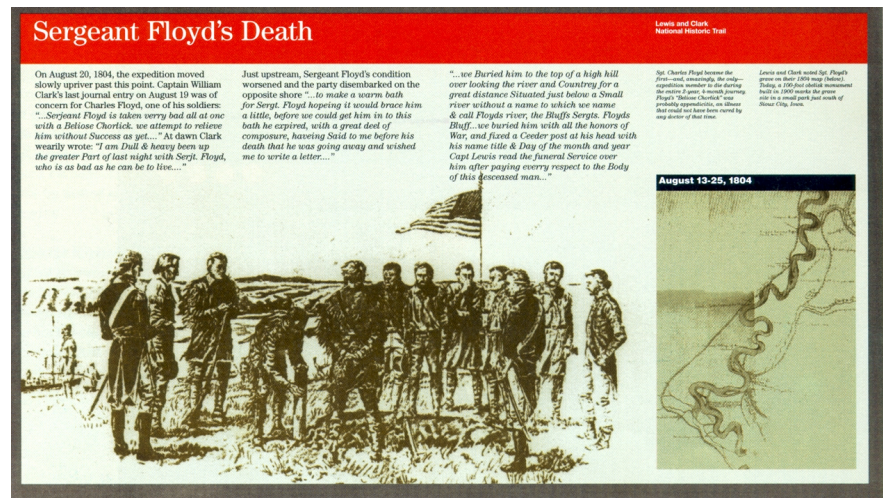
Sample Layout Grid (See the Appendix for dimensions.)

space to create visual interest. Try to keep one-third of the panel area open and unused. Avoid cluttering elements such as excessive decorative borders, complex typefaces, and too much text.

- Develop a strong center of interest or focal point, and a visual sequence from that focal point. Design with a planned order that guides the viewer through illustrations and type, from big items to small, from color to non-color, and from the unusual to the usual. Emphasis and contrast will let visitors know what is important and will create interest.
- Color is effective. Color attracts attention, improves readability, and increases memory retention. Warm advancing colors such as reds, oranges, and yellows are stimulating, while cool retreating colors like greens, blues, and violets are more relaxing.
- Lines direct viewers, tie elements together, and create a mood. Vertical lines suggest power, horizontal lines relay tranquility, and converging and diverging lines add depth and tension.

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- Texture can create emphasis, separation, or unity.
- Use universally accepted symbols in addition to other graphics.
- Use balance. Asymmetrical balance will make text and graphics appealing and create diversity, while symmetrical balance is more static.



National Park Service Standard Interpretive Panel

Images

The saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words" has much validity in interpretive work. Make sure all images and illustrations are historically and culturally accurate, and permission has been granted before using them. There are other considerations for the use of images in outdoor exhibits including:

- Quality
- Durability
- Production Techniques
- Availability of Source Material

Paper photographs tend to fade in the sunlight. Their life can be extended if embedded in fiberglass with an ultraviolet inhibiting agent, but for the best outdoor durability, reproduce the image in porcelain enamel. Some of the new digital output materials show promise. Using photos requires good source material, and original color slides work the best for color reproduction. For black and white, negatives are best.

There are a variety of graphic images that can be used including:

- Photos
- Drawings

- Artwork
- Lewis and Clark Trail logos, such as the Trailblazer Logo, the National Bicentennial Logo, and the Washington State Bicentennial Logo
- Lewis and Clark journal maps (with permission)
- Other historic maps
- Visitor orientation maps (will vary by use)

Type

In terms of the layout and visual appeal of a panel, type is another graphic element. Consider the following items related to the use of type:

- Type (font) style has unique and expressive character that can be used to enhance interpretation.
- Size of type suggests order to be read.
- Align letters for easiest reading, not necessarily mechanically.
- Set text flush left and ragged right (generally).
- Symbols and objects are more identifiable than words, they may be the only means of communication for nonreaders and foreign visitors. Use standard symbols as outlined

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in the Code of Federal Regulations, Parks, Forests, and Public Property Vol. 36, Parts 1-1999.

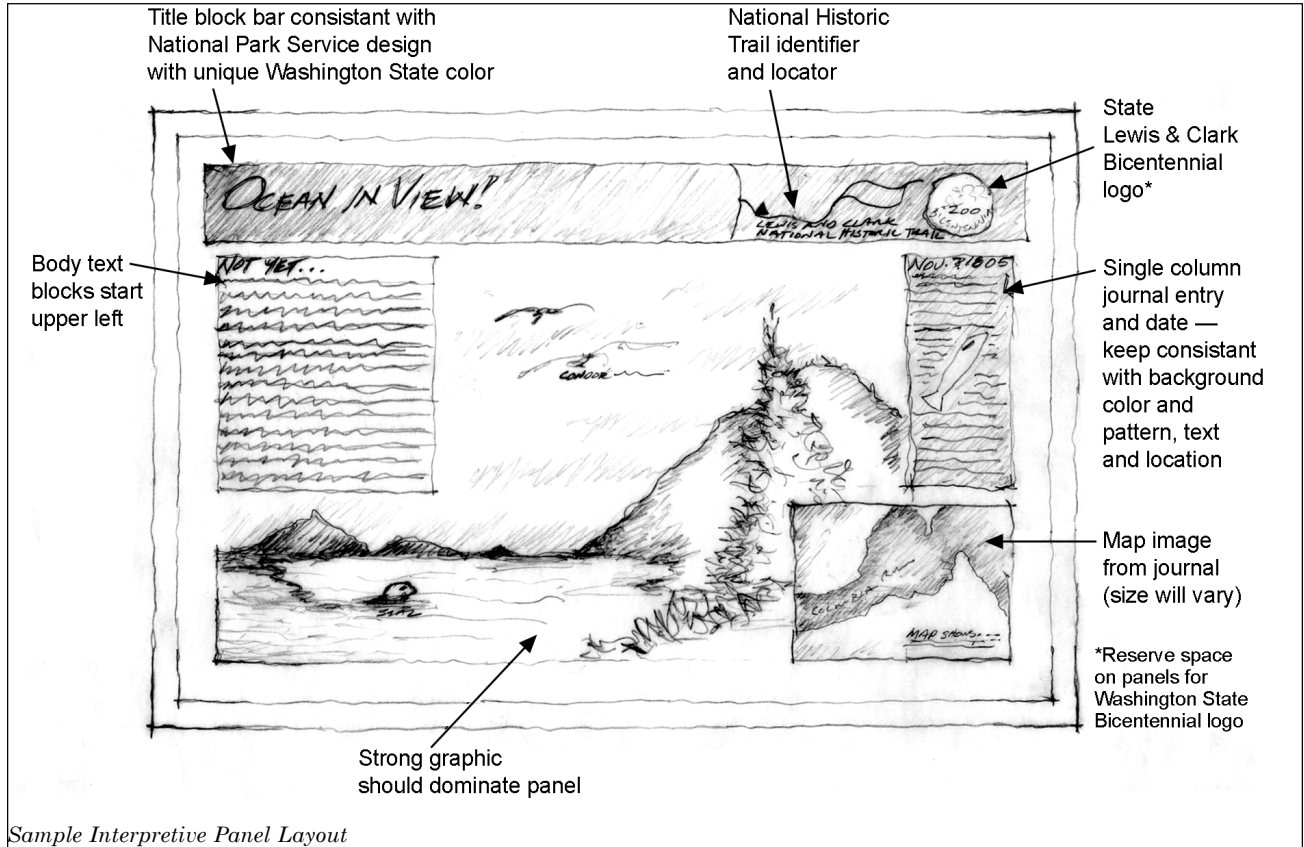
- Try not to mix too many font styles, it creates disharmony. Use italics, bold, and print size variation for emphasis.
- Type size should depend not only on emphasis but also on viewing distance.
- Consider readers that may be visually impaired. Contrasting colors between characters and background is most readable, light letters on a dark background are typically the easiest to read under most conditions.

For the design of the interpretive panels along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, we recommend adhering to the National Park Service (NPS) National Historic Trail standard types and type sizes.

(See the Appendix for recommended type style and font size samples from the NPS guidelines.) Most interpretive panel text should be ITC Century Book, which is a good readable serif style for signs (serif is a bar that crosses letter ends). For orientation and information panels, Helvetica Neue #75 should be used. In addition, to pick up on the quality of the Lewis and Clark Journals, the use of other (non NPS) special Lewis and Clark style types could be considered for journal entry quotes and side-bars. Consider fonts like Galliard Bold or Nicholas Cochin Bold for headings, Texas Hero for subheads, and Nicholas Cochin or Perpetua for body text (see Appendix).

Interpretive Text

The interpretive text should compliment a strong graphic layout. It should inspire, be memorable, and engage in a concise way.



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Interpretive text is an art form of the essence. It should be organized, enjoyable, related to the reader, and thematic. Some considerations for interpretive text include:

- Ensure accuracy and clearly state if information is speculation or state the source. Credit all quotes.
- Focus on a Lewis and Clark Expedition related interpretive theme.
- Use short readable messages, short sentences, and short paragraphs (research shows that text blocks exceeding 50 to 75 words will lose the readers interest).
- Use nouns with active verbs.
- Inspire and provoke in bold and simple language.
- Use a minimal number of capital letters.
- Write text for the intended visitor with a level of understandability for the broadest range of visitors (generally the 7th grade reading level).
- Try for fresh perspectives, poetic twists, vivid imagery, and simple eloquence (sometimes powerful quotes work best).
- Involve the reader intellectually, emotionally, and even physically.
- Help the visitor see the site in a new way.
- Relate to the visitor's experience by using personal pronouns, personal language, and familiar terms.
- Illustrate with metaphors, analogies, quotes, and real examples.

Siting Interpretive Exhibits

The siting of interpretive exhibits is important for fully integrating the special characteristics of the site with the interpretation of the Lewis and Clark story. The following considerations will help guide the site design:

- Respect site sensitivity. Do not place interpretive exhibits in areas that may be habitat for rare or endangered flora and fauna, may be culturally sensitive by either having sacred value, traditional use, or archeological significance by Native Americans, or may have adverse impacts on private land owners.
- Draw on site characteristics such as views and access.
- Integrate regional materials.
- Tie interpretation to views and geographical features.
- Plant vegetation and landscaping that enhances the native site conditions and qualities. Whenever possible use flora noted in the journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



Existing interpretive panels along the Lewis and Clark Trail in Washington

- Site interpretive elements to achieve a unity in design with materials and colors that work with the surrounding landscape.
- Provide access for people of all abilities to experience the same or similar interpretive opportunities. All interpretive markers and their locations should meet the accessibility criteria established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Use low angle panel mounting for those in wheelchairs, and use large text and a tactile experience for the visually impaired.

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- Construct pathways and trails with durable materials and of the appropriate size for the trail type, anticipated level of use, and location.
- Ensure that scale, context, and placement relates to visitor interest but does not compete with or block out what is being interpreted.
- Do not intrude visually on the landscape and natural surroundings. Low angled interpretation is best for fitting in with the landscape and being read by children and those in wheelchairs. Keep larger panels within kiosks or in nonsensitive areas.
- Consider the changing site conditions during all seasons, weather, and the time of day.
- When incorporating or replacing new interpretation with existing Lewis and Clark interpretation, review the existing interpretation for content, quality, and soundness. Replace, update, and correct interpretive exhibits as needed, or creatively and sensitively unify new interpretation with the existing through site enhancement, and possibly new bases and stands.